LIFE ON THE UPLANDS

BY JOHN D. FREEMAN

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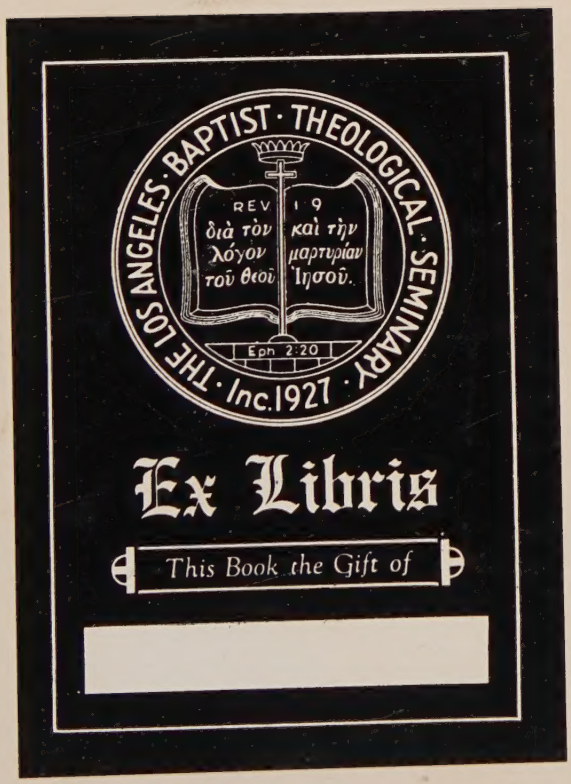

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Life On The Uplands

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

BY
J. D. FREEMAN

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To my Mother

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"If Thou would'st have me speak, Lord give
me speech!
So many cries are uttered nowadays,
That scarce a song, however clear or true,
Can thread the jostling tumult safe and reach
The ears of men, buzz-filled with poor denays:
Barb Thou my words with light! Make my
song new!
And men will hear, whether I sing or preach."

—*George MacDonald.*

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"All's love, yet all's law."

—*Browning*.

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Life on the Uplands

CHAPTER I

A LIFE IN A LOVE

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Had David done nothing more in his lifetime than teach mankind to say "The Lord is my Shepherd," he would have conferred an inestimable boon. In this single sentence he has given to the world a conception of God that floods the spiritual imagination with ruddy light. It is a great rose window set in the temple of truth, through which "the white radiance of eternity" streams in and falls with softened splendor upon the minds of men.

The vital centre of each man's religion is his conviction regarding God's relation to his individual life.

Does God care for me? Am I of any consequence to Him? Will He hear me if I pray to Him? Will He come to me if I call to Him? Will He lead me if I look to Him? Will He save me if I trust in Him? Upon the answers to these questions depends the character of his religious life.

If one must think of God as a deity seated beyond the stars, unconscious of and unconcerned for him, too much engrossed with the multitude to single out the man—viewing humanity as one might view a forest from some far-off hilltop, seeing only the outline dark against the horizon, but distinguishing no separate tree, much less the single leaf that flutters on the bough—then the foundation of religion slips from beneath his soul and the mainspring of devotion breaks within his heart.

For religion is worship and trust and love and obedience. And all these are personal relations. They can only be exercised towards a God with whom we may commune, a God

who places Himself in intimate, personal touch with individual lives.

There is, perhaps, no more serious task set for the religious faith of our own time than just this one of maintaining within the soul a continuous and vivid sense of God's personal presence and individualizing love.

The modern view of the universe has created a new problem for faith. While enhancing our appreciation of Jehovah's majesty and power, it tends to weaken our assurance of His sympathetic concern for the single lives of men. The telescope has disclosed to our view a universe enormously vaster than that which the ancients knew. God has more worlds to care for than they supposed He had. "The wheel of nature" is a bigger thing to turn, and a more complicated machine to lubricate, than they had thought. Moreover, the study of physical phenomena has wrought in us a deeper conviction of the uniformity of nature's processes. Through all her movements and changes we now behold the reign of

one all-pervading, all-controlling system of law.

With mind intent upon these facts it is easy to drop from the soul the sense of God's personal presence and permit the thought of His special providence to fade from our minds. To many it seems as if science has stolen away the Lord and they know not where it has laid Him. For this reason—because of this new burden added to faith's task—we of to-day have special need to fortify our hearts with the strong assurances of spiritually visioned men like David, to whom the presence and companionship of God was the most vivid reality of their lives. The confession of faith which such men give to the world is valid, not merely for their own times, but for all times. They were specialists in the things of the spirit, experts in "the practice of the presence of God," and the findings of their experience have permanent significance for mankind. They build a trellis upon which the faith of succeeding generations may climb and lean and ripen. For,

after all, we live in the same universe as David did. It was as spacious then as now. Law was as rigid then as now. It is but our thought of these which has changed. The modern view of the world has created no fresh problems for Jehovah. His tasks are no greater than of old. His throne is no more distant. If He was with men in the former days, He is with us now.

It is in the strengthening of this assurance that "The Shepherd Psalm" renders its chiefest service to modern life. Among all the declarations of human confidence in the personalizing care of God, there is not another which can rival this in strength, simplicity, warmth and beauty. It is so buoyant, so glad, so assured, so calm in its conviction of God's watchful, loving care, that it answers the most anxious questionings of the human heart. As we read it, the burdening thoughts of far-flung space and circling worlds and unbending laws roll from our souls and God seems near to our little lives in attentive interest and

sympathetic concern. At its magic touch the universe seems to contract to a sanctuary where God and the soul meet each other in an intimacy and a privacy that shut all else outside. The psalm does not argue about God's personality or His nearness or His care, it simply sings out the gladness of one life that God had shepherded. "Like some sweet, beguiling melody," it steals into the reader's heart and wraps about it the sense of a Divine presence and encompassment.

The psalm is clearly reminiscent of David's own life on the uplands when, as a young man, he was busied with the care of sheep.

Its imagery is redolent of steaming meadows, radiant with the light of remembered morns and noons, and tremulous with the excitement of unforgotten perils and adventures.

In the ripened spiritual thought of David, that early shepherd life of his has come to be viewed as sacramental. The long years which have passed since then have steeped the memories

of that life to such limpid clearness in his soul that they now spread before his mind a mirror in which he beholds reflected the mercy and the wonder of God's providential care for men.

Shepherd life, as David knew it, was a life essentially emotional and devotional. Shepherdhood, as David exercised it, was a relation at once so affectionately solicitous and so ingeniously resourceful as to be akin to motherhood.

For the sheep of Eastern lands live in their shepherd. He is the centre of their unity, the guarantee of their security, the pledge of their prosperity. For them, pastures and wells and paths and folds are all in him. Apart from him their condition is one of abject and pathetic helplessness. Should any sudden calamity tear him from them they are forthwith undone. Distressed and scattered, they stumble among the rocks, or bleed in the thorn-tangle, or flee, wild with fear, before the terror of the wolf. Hence a good shepherd never forsakes his sheep. He accompanies them by day and

abides with them by night. In the morning he goes before them to lead them out, and in the evening, when he has gathered them into the fold, he lies down in their midst. Then as he views their still, white forms clustered about him in the darkness, his heart brims with a brooding tenderness.

This shepherd life is one of such continuous and loving devotement that it readily lends itself to religious impression. May we not trace something of that large capacity for spiritual insight and feeling, something of that tender mysticism so characteristic of the best Scottish minds, to the fact that they have sprung from generations of contemplative shepherds accustomed to commune with the Most High amid the solitudes, and to carry with them the sense of a divine presence as they led their flocks from day to day upon the silent hills?

Certain it is that the springs of David's spiritual nature owed much of their life-long force and freshness to their infilling with the religious ideas

that flowed in upon them during those brimming days of silence when he plied a shepherd's crook amid the lonely Judean hills.

It was then he came to realize that though he was a helpless creature, abroad in the great world-wilderness, he was neither forsaken nor forgotten. He, too, belonged to a tended and guarded flock. Jehovah was his shepherd. His own life, like that of his dependent sheep was "a life in a love."

Through many a troubled day of his checkered career David must have carried that precious thought within his heart. In his poetic nature it was the seed of a song. And it must often have come to the verge of its unfolding. He must often have felt within him "the fire of the coming flower." Again and again it must have trembled on the verge of its apocalypse. One day, we know not when, but it was a blessed day for the world, a special inspiration smote him and the seed burst into blossom. On that day he gave the world this perfect lyric of religious trust, a lyric which has sung itself into

the hearts of a thousand generations and will sing on until its music melts away and blends with the harmonies of heaven.

TIME-NOTES

A remarkable feature of this psalm, but one which seems to have been almost entirely overlooked hitherto, is the Time-Notes which are scattered through it. A careful study of its structure has convinced me that these notes occur at regular intervals throughout the psalm, that they correspond to the successive periods of the shepherd's day, and that they reflect the whole round of the shepherd's work from the morning to the evening hours.

Studied from this standpoint the psalm, beginning with the second verse, presents a series of dissolving views which shade into one another with striking effect. By following these Time-Notes it not only becomes apparent that the figure of shepherdhood is carried through the composition consistently to the end, but the reader comes to appreciate the progress of its doctrine and the growing force and beauty of the teaching up to the last triumphant word.

"O Child! O new-born denizen
Of life's great city! On thy head
The glory of the morn is shed
Like a celestial benison!
Here at the portal thou dost stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate
Into the future's undiscovered land."

—*Longfellow.*

CHAPTER II

A MORNING MEAL ON THE MEADOWS

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

THE shepherd is early astir. He has his flock forth from the fold and well out upon the feeding ground, while yet

> "Morning's at seven,
> The hill-side's dew-pearl'd."

This is the ideal feeding time. The flock is fresh, its hunger is keen, and the pasture is moist and sweet. A good shepherd always provides a full feed early in the day. It is in consequence of their hearty feeding that the sheep "lie down." Not in weariness, but in contentment, do they stretch themselves upon the green. The picture here is not one of exhaustion, but of satisfaction. The recumbence of the flock proclaims the abundance of the pasture. Tired sheep would be

better in a fold than in a field. They would rather sleep than eat. To them a bank of moss in the cool shadow of a rock would be more welcome than any pastures, however green. Clearly, it is the fulness of the flock that is suggested here. Cropping the sweet grasses, they quickly feed to satisfaction and lie down content.

The psalm at this point reflects the comfort and peace of those happy souls who, in early life, have tasted and seen that God is good. Satisfied in the morning with His mercy, they rejoice and are glad all their days. To make an ideal beginning of our life we must go with the Good Shepherd early and spend the dewy morn with Him upon the meadows of His grace. For then the spiritual appetite is keen and the heart feeds hungrily on the fat pastures of God's love until it is nourished into a deep content. There are no lives which dwell in such a profundity of peace or hold within them such reserve and resource of spiritual power as those who can say, "Thou hast been my God from my youth."

And this is the secret of life-long security. The soul that is satisfied in God is safe. Full-fed sheep abide on the feeding ground, close to the shepherd's care. If any stray from him and lose themselves in the wilderness, it is because of the discontentment of unsatisfied hunger. The stragglers are the nibblers, not the hearty feeders. They who abound in Christ abide in Him. An early filling ensures a faithful following. To stand against the fascinations of the world we must rest in the satisfactions of God.

The world is full of lean and famished spirits, men and women whose souls are fainting in them, who might now be vital and virile, with vigor for righteousness and reserve power for trial, had they but responded to the Shepherd's call early in the morning.

It is pathetic to witness the multitude of troubled lives that have slipped away from the Good Shepherd's care to be driven by the wolves of passion, to be torn by the thorns of remorse, to tramp the pathless sands of doubt and

to drink from the dead, salt sea of unbelief, through the misfortune of having missed the satisfaction of the morning meal upon the meadows.

No after-feeding can ever quite compensate, in this life, for a spiritually impoverished youth. The finer nerves of the spirit atrophy if deprived of their appropriate nourishment during these halcyon days. Youth is *par excellence* "the growing time" of the religious nature. It needs to be richly fed. All who have the care of growing children know the enormous demands for food made by the physical constitution until full stature is attained. It is a cruelty and a crime to arrest development by stinting the nourishment at this critical stage of life.

The same principle holds true with reference to intellectual development. We have witnessed a distinct renaissance of interest upon this point of late in the pedagogical world. It is asserted now that one-half of all the knowledge which the mind acquires in this world comes into its possession

by the seventh year. One is inclined at first to dispute the accuracy of the statement, but upon reflection it seems justified. Let any one write down a list of the facts concerning which the child gains knowledge within that period, facts concerning his own being and the universe about him and the God above him, and he will be amazed at the magnitude of the sum total.

And certainly the principle applies in the spiritual realm. Indeed, it has special application here. For, as a rule, the spiritual faculty in childhood outruns all other faculties in its development. The capacity for God is now at its zenith. In receptivity, in delicacy and sureness of intuition, in the experience of wonder, the child is peculiarly ready for the kingdom of God. The church will need to learn a little psychology before she will be ready to do her whole duty by child life. She must be made aware that childhood has its pensive, meditative moments. The child is a mystic. Every child is essentially religious. His spirit feels the wonder of the world

and is drenched with the sense of mystery. He is full of questionings that are big with spiritual significance.

The strongest guarantee we have of the perpetuity of religion in the world is the birth of children, the perpetual renewal in humanity of the child nature. "Blessed be childhood," wrote Amiel, "which brings down something of heaven into our rough earthliness. These eighty thousand daily births, of which statistics tell us, represent, as it were, an effusion of innocence and freshness, struggling not only against the death of the race, but against human corruption, and the universal gangrene of sin. All the good and wholesome feeling which is intertwined with childhood and the cradle is one of the secrets of the providential government of the world. Suppress this life-giving dew, and human society would be scorched and devastated by selfish passion. Supposing that humanity had been composed of a thousand millions of immortal beings, whose number could neither increase nor diminish, where should we be, and

what should we be? A thousand times more learned, no doubt, but a thousand times more evil."

Coincident with this essential religiousness of childhood should be noted the affinity of child life for the Christian faith. Nowhere does the foot of childhood move with such free and familiar step as in the pastures of that Good Shepherd who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." One of the most unanswerable arguments in favor of the universality and finality of the Christian faith is to be found in the fact that it so readily relates itself to the spiritual instincts of youth, and so firmly approves itself in the heart of the little child.

In all this there is no thought of forcing the religious development of childhood. Far be it from any of us to burden youth with an untimely over-seriousness. Let it have its May-day of mirthfulness and glee! Let it have its songs and dreams! These will perish soon enough in the jostling tumult of the world. It is a duty to make childhood care-free and

happy; to keep the faces of the little ones fresh and round and smooth. But the surest way to do this very thing is to minister to the spiritual imagination. Let us remember that other word of Amiel: "How enormously important are these first conversations of childhood! I felt it this morning with a sort of religious terror. Innocence and childhood are sacred. The father or mother casting in the fruitful word are accomplishing a pontifical act, and ought to perform it with religious awe, with prayer and gravity, for they are laboring at the kingdom of God."

May it be given to each of us to interpret the wistfulness of the children as their heart-cry for the Christ, and to read in it their voiceless prayer to the Good Shepherd:

"O satisfy us in the morning with Thy mercy;
That we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

"In the poorest cottage is one Book, wherein for several thousands of years the spirit of man has found light and nourishment, and an interpreting response to whatever is Deepest in him."—*Carlyle.*

CHAPTER III

A MIDDAY DRINK FROM THE WELL

"He leadeth me beside the still waters."

It is the noontide hour. "Sunbeams like swords" are smiting the sheep. They pant with heat and burn with thirst. It is time for the shepherd to lead them to the drinking-place and cool them at the waters. He knows the way. All over these Judean hills, at frequent intervals, there are deep, walled wells, whose waters never fail. A good shepherd carries in his mind a chart of every well in all his grazing area. These wells are his chief dependence. Were it not for them the country would be impossible for grazing purposes. For though there are many streams the sheep cannot safely drink from them. Far different, remember, are these rough hill-torrents of the Bible lands from the gentle brooks that flow so softly between their banks of green

through our meadows of the West. In these watercourses of the East the flow is inconstant. There is either a drought, when the naked stones glow hot and white in the brook's dry bed, or a foaming freshet with wild waters leaping tumultuously down the steep incline. Often, too, the banks are treacherous and crumble suddenly beneath the weight of an unwary foot.

No shepherd attempts to water his flock at such a stream lest the sheep break through and be swept away and drowned. The sheep themselves dread these rough waters and tremble with excitement at a near approach. They are waters of disquietude rather than waters of rest. Mindful of their awkwardness and timidity, the shepherd, therefore, selects for his flock a safe drinking-place. He leads them beside the still waters gathered in the deep, cool cylinder of some neighboring well. Here the sheep dispose themselves; the eager crowding of their fleecy bodies foaming about the shepherd in a white, undulating circle of appealing expectancy. At the well-

mouth, with bared arms, the shepherd stands and plunges the bucket far down into the darkness, sinking it beneath the waters and shattering the stillness which till now has brooded there. He plunges and draws. Swiftly the rope coils at his feet as the laden bucket rises responsive to the rhythmic movements of his sinewy arms. Into the trough he pours the sparkling contents. Again the bucket shoots into the darkness of the well; again, and yet again, and when the trough is filled he calls the thirsty sheep to come in groups and drink. The lambs first, afterwards the older members of the flock, till all are served and satisfied.

There are few lovelier sights than this to be seen in any land. How eagerly they drink! How grateful the cold waters to their hot, dry throats! What speedy relief they bring! What a sweet sense of refreshment they impart! For though these waters are "still," they are not stagnant. The well is spring-fed. Down there in those dim depths a fountain pul-

sates, ceaselessly pouring its contents into the well in crystal jets. The spring is the heart of the well, and hence it is "living water" that the shepherd gives.

The message here is to our soul-thirst. And verily, the human soul is a thirsty thing. It thirsts for knowledge. To satisfy this thirst man ransacks the universe. He bores into the bowels of the earth; he dives into the depths of the sea; he builds observatories on mountain tops; he lingers in the laboratory with scalpel, microscope and retort; he immures himself in musty libraries; his thirst for knowledge lures him onward in an endless quest.

And there is the thirst for righteousness. It is an intermittent thirst, but when it springs up in the soul it parches like a flame. David knew the agony of this thirst when he cried, "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean

heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." As shipwrecked sailors cry to heaven for rain, so cried he to God for righteousness.

But deeper than all, more universal and more constant, is the thirst for love. It never dies; not even in the lowest and the worst. It is elemental, ineradicable. Sin cannot pluck it out. The fires of hell cannot burn it out. "All the world loves a lover." He is the centrepiece in every popular novel, and in every successful play. The crowd clamors for his entrance, and will not be satisfied until he appears. In love's absence "The palace of art" becomes a prison, and the soul "a spot of dull stagnation":

"A still salt pool, lock'd in with bars of sand,
Left on the shore; that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
Their moon-led waters white."

And all these thirsts Christ satisfies. The thirst for knowledge He satisfies by His revelation of God. That is wisdom's sum. Until we come to

Him we are searchers after truth; we find Him and henceforth are searchers into truth. In Him "are all the riches of wisdom and knowledge hid."

The thirst for righteousness He satisfies by the reconciling grace of His sacrifice and the cleansing power of His spirit. To the thirsty conscience the atonement of Christ is like floods of water poured on sun-baked earth.

"Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within."

The thirst for love He answers with the gift of "Love divine, all love excelling." In that love is the "Joy of heaven to earth come down."

"O Christ He is the fountain,
The deep, sweet well of love."

The joy of the soul at the well, when deep answers unto calling deep, is past the telling. Then the soul sings the song: "Spring up, O well! sing ye unto it!" George Adam Smith, with one of his master-touches, interprets

for us this song at the well. "The drawers who sang this song knew that their well was alive. They called to each other to *sing back to it.* The verb means to sing in antiphon, to answer the music of the waters with their own. That spirt in the dark hollow was not the only well-spring; the men's hearts gushed back to it; fountain called to fountain, Spring up, O well! Sing ye back to it."

The waters of our Shepherd's well are not only satisfying but curative. I have not spoken of the soul's ignoble thirsts—those raging passions that inflame and blight the life, the thirst for wealth, for preferment, for revenge, for gross and sensual pleasures—but they are burning fiercely everywhere. These Christ cures. All the foolish discontent, the morbid thirst that has become disease, He extinguishes. The inflooding of His love and life puts out these baleful flames as the rising tide of ocean puts out the fires kindled on the beach.

But there is more than the contents of the well to attract us here. We are

reminded by the picture before us of the security and accessibility of its waters for the thirsty sheep that stay by the shepherd's side. It speaks to us of God's tender thoughtfulness for the awkward and timid members of His flock. He has graciously gathered the water of life for them into a safe receptacle. He reserves it for them in the deep, cool well of His word. It is true, no doubt, that much good water foams between the banks of speculative systems of religious thought, but multitudes of simple souls lack the skill and courage necessary to reach it there. It need not be denied that much pure water rushes down the steep ways of scientific and philosophical learning, but it needs to be gathered into quiet pools before the flock can drink. As they fret their course through much of the literature of our time, these streams are too rough and their banks too brittle to make safe drinking-places for the humble, timid souls which are God's chief care. Men of tested faith and trained dialectical skill may keep their footing

in all these torrents, and drink from all these troubled waters in security. But a lamb will drown where a lion may drink. And even for those who are not swept away by them these waters are but a second best. One may shrewdly guess that it is mental exercise they give rather than spiritual refreshment. There is less comfort in the drinking when one must fight for footing while he drinks. He will scarcely stay to drink his fill. I have noticed that even the sturdiest thoughted and clearest visioned Christians are glad to get away from the torrent to the well. They find it cooler there, and quieter, and more refreshing. They prefer, above all current literature, the "still waters" poured out for them in the narratives, the songs, the gospels and epistles of the Bible. Equally with the artisan, the merchant, the nurse, the school-teacher, the tired mother, all the thirsty souls who come in from the heated fields of a workaday world, they thirst for a message fresh from its fountain in the living Word.

It is a great day in a Christian's experience when he gets a taste of new deeps of truth; when the line is lengthened for him and the bucket rises laden from some before unfathomed nook of Holy Writ. To get a deeper view of God, of Christ, of the Cross, of the Holy Spirit, of Christian privilege and opportunity, is to get a drink from "the northeast corner of the well." And to receive this boon direct from the hand of Christ, with no water-carrier near but His blessed Spirit, is to experience a joy and an invigoration that repays long waiting at the well.

There is no other way to get at the heart of the well but to wait upon Christ and bid Him draw for us. Our rope is too short to sound the depths. The most critical analysis of Scripture, the most painstaking and accurate examination of the literary and historical setting, cannot sink our vessel for us into its nether springs. To that fact the great mass of scholarly but sapless and uninspiring books about the Bible, which loads the shelves of

every studious pastor, bears abundant testimony. There is but one way to drink from the deeps, and that is to keep in close, personal touch with Him who gives the well its content, and fills it from His own exhaustless spirit. One pull on the line by the hand that was pierced will sink the vessel lower than all the weights which human scholarship can attach thereto. I do not mean by these words to disparage the critical study of the sacred writings. That has a value, a high value, in clearing the way to the well-head. But it cannot sink the bucket into its spiritual depths. I have known unlettered men to whom the well gave up its richest treasures, because of their patient, humble waiting on the Shepherd. Clear and cool and sparkling He poured out the water of life for them, and they drank and were joyous and strong. And I know other men whose accumulations of scholarship seem to have worn out their spiritual receptivity, and who present to-day the sad spectacle of thirsty spirits,

"Sinking leaky buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up."

To all such thirsty ones the Master of the well still speaks the word of invitation: "*Ask of me and I will give thee living water.*"

"Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm."

—*John G. Whittier.*

CHAPTER IV

A NOONTIDE REST IN THE SHADE

"He restoreth my soul."

It is still too hot for the flock to be exposed upon the sun-smit hills. The noontide hour drags slowly by. The Lord of Day seems to halt in the heavens as he touches the meridian. Ere he resumes his march he leans from his blazing battlements and shoots a quiver of fiery arrows into the earth. With that fierce heat pelting down upon them the sheep would faint if led forth into the open ways. The shepherd, therefore, seeks a place of shelter for them where they may rest awhile, withdrawn from the pitiless blaze. Now he leads them into the shadow of a great rock and bids them lie down in its welcome coolness. Perhaps some old fold is near and he guides them into its inviting shade. Or it may be a stately, wide-branched

tree that stands, with its fluttering foliage like a

"Fountain of green in summer air,
Whose tremulous spray cools the faint meadow,
And croons to all of a careless care."

Within such grateful shades the sheep abide until the fiercest heat of noon is past. Thus their strength is restored and they rise rested and freshened for the long tramp that lies before them.

How readily this scene translates itself into terms of religious experience for those who have known the Good Shepherd's care! Full well He knows the fiery heats which we encounter during the days of our early manhood: the flaming anger, the blazing conceit, the hot ambition, the burning pride, the consuming lust. Hours there are, at this stage of our journey, when all the atmosphere of the inner life quivers with the heat of passion. And the ministry which Christ performs in these crisis hours of the soul is one of the crowning mercies of our lives. He calls us aside for a season into a cooling shade. Nor does He

put us forth again until the danger is past.

Christ shelters us from the heats of life in the shade of His own majestic Personality. The thought of restoration in the protecting shade of the divine presence occurs repeatedly throughout the scriptures. It strikes the key note of the ninety first psalm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." It is the central idea in psalm One hundred and twenty one. "The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." It is in view of this that the promise follows:— "The sun shall not smite thee by day." Isaiah dwells upon the thought with evident delight. "For thou hast been a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat." Again, with the thought of the divine presence in his mind he sings, "And there shall be a pavillion for a shadow in the daytime from the heat." It seems to have been a favourite conception with the old testament writers, familiar as they were with the killing heats of the Syrian

plains, that the gracious Lord was as a noontide shade to fainting pilgrims on life's weary way. The thought is even more familiar and more comforting to us who think of God as revealed in the person of the incarnate Son. Jesus Christ standing beside us calls us into the sweetest, coolest shade that was ever cast upon the heated ways of life. He is "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." He is like an umbrageous tree, laden with refreshing fruit, inviting us to a delicious banquet beneath its boughs. He, too, is fold for us as well as shepherd. It seems to have been with the thought of the noontide heat and the noontide fold in His mind that He said "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Saved from the noontide heat.

And the shade with which the presence of Christ envelopes the soul is wondrously potent in restorative efficacy. Even the sense of mystery which He flings upon our hearts has a healing coolness in it. There are mysteries in the theanthropic person-

ality of Christ which no metaphysician will ever solve. In the depths of His being there are impenetrable recesses. He towers above the plain of human understanding as a great rock of mystery. We should be very thankful that it is so. This element of mystery is wholesome for us. A Christ whose personality presented no unfathomable deeps, a Christ through whom we could peer, with no sense of mystery obstructing our human vision, would be too thin and unsubstantial to cast the cooling shade. The element of mystery in Christ inspires reverence and awe. The airs which blow into our faces from the abysmal deeps of His inscrutable personality, fan all the baneful fevers from our blood.

Who can cherish hatred while he kneels in the presence of the calm, gentle, all-forgiving One whose love passes understanding? Who can cherish pride or selfishness while he lies at the foot of incarnate humility and selflessness? Who can hold his hot ambitions in his heart while he

looks up into the face of Him "who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Mystery? Yes, the shade Christ casts upon us is thick with it. But it is a shade in which the soul may sweetly rest. This element of mystery is indeed, a prime condition for the restoration of fainting human souls. Have you not observed how Jesus, in the eleventh chapter of Matthew, gives a background of mystery to His blessed invitation to rest? There is not another passage in the Bible where the airs of heaven touch the soul more wooingly than here. Yet they issue from an impenetrable deep. "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." There glooms the

rock of mystery. But in the shade of it, what promise of restoration! "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Furthermore, the shelter which Christ affords is the shelter of His Cross. Have you duly appreciated the majesty of the cross and the cooling shade it casts? Be not always thinking of that thing of wood, that accursed instrument of torture upon which they crucified Him. The real cross was the one He carried in His heart. The uttermost cross was that weight which pressed upon His spirit, the agony, the shame, the horror, the sense of abandonment which He endured as sin-bearer for mankind. He did not need to be murdered in order to become the atoning sacrifice for sin. The cross which He carried in His heart would surely and speedily have done its work and crushed Him into

death. That cry of anguish, "Now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour?" —that sobbing agony in the garden, "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"—were premonitions of approaching dissolution. They tell us that the inner cross was pressing Him through the gates of death. Had Judas never betrayed Him; had Caiaphas not condemned Him; had Pilate not released Him to the mob; had Roman soldiers never stretched Him on the wooden cross, nor pierced His hands and feet with nails; still the cross would have killed Him. Indeed, it was not the crucifixion that put Him to death. He died of a broken heart. No man took His life from Him. His hour was come and though He died upon the cross of wood, He laid down His life of Himself. He is the Good Shepherd that gave His life for the sheep.

The most awful and yet the most comforting vision that a soul oppressed with sin can ever look upon is that of the Son of God bearing the sin

of the world. What mountains of iniquity were heaped upon Him!

"O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!
Our load was laid on Thee;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead,
Bearing all ill for me:
A victim led, Thy blood was shed;
Now there's no load for me."

Upon that load of iniquity the flames of divine indignation were kindled. That was the fiercest conflagration this universe ever witnessed. The fire burned through until it touched the ocean fulness of righteousness in Christ. Then it went out like a spark in the sea. Yes, the burden broke His heart but not before the fire had burned itself to ashes. Hence it is that in the shadow of the cross such deep, sweet rest is found. It is cool there, and safe because no fuel is left for the flames to light upon. And so when conscience is aflame with the sense of guilt, when the spirit burns with remorse, when the fires of judgment kindle all around us, we flee to the cross and hide and are saved.

Then, again, the shade in which Christ restores the soul is the shade of the Throne. The Great Shepherd who now leads the flock is King of kings and Lord of lords. He shepherds stars as well as souls. He sits at the apex of the universe and rules all worlds. The lines of governance are all gathered into the hands that were pierced. And what a speedy and sure restorative for the trembling spirit is the sense of Christ's sovereignty! When we move amid "the maddening maze of things"; when the world seems like an arena where blind forces clash in gladiatorial contest; when we are "heated hot with burning fears and dipt in baths of hissing tears"; when there seems to be no order or justice anywhere; when the very earth seems to reel and totter beneath our unsteady feet; when we are dizzy with bewilderment and numb with dread; then there is rest and restoration for us in the shadow of Christ's throne. How majestic and calm it stands! What gospels it proclaims! One steadfast look to the

throne of grace and terror dies. It tells us that all the forces of the universe are in leash to love. In that assurance the erstwhile fearful one can say, "He restoreth my soul."

It was in order to administer this comfort that Christ passed through the heavens, and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. He holds His throne for the succor of His flock. It is a foretaste of heaven to rest in the cool of the throne. There shall be no alarms in that heavenly life because, "He that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall lead them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

"Leader of faithful souls, and Guide
Of all who travel to the sky,
Come and with us, e'en us abide,
Who would on Thee alone rely;
On Thee alone our spirits stay,
While held in life's uneven way."

—*Charles Wesley*.

CHAPTER V

AN AFTERNOON CLIMB ON THE PATHS

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

HERE and there in the grazing country of Judea the traveller will come upon narrow, well-worn paths. Generations of shepherds and myriads of flocks have trodden these old ways. They are the recognized highways, traversing the land from well to well and from fold to fold. To come upon one of these paths is to pick up a clue that leads out from the mazes of the wilderness to some familiar rendezvous. A competent shepherd has expert knowledge of all these paths. Only with this knowledge can he plan the day's pilgrimage with accuracy and preclude the danger of being overtaken with his flock by night in wild and undefended places.

The picture which we have before us now is that of the shepherd guiding

his rested and freshened flock along one of these old paths. It was a fortunate thing for the sheep that they had experienced the rest and refreshment of the well before they attempted the long strip of road that stretches before them now. Restoration there has conditioned them for sturdy climbing here. For these paths are often steep and stony, severely testing the flock's strength. Before the day is done and the night fold reached, they must make heavy draught upon their stored-up energy.

The teaching here has special application to the strenuous side of spiritual life. That life is not all spent in feeding in green pastures and drinking from cool fountains. The greater part of it consists in toilful tramping on the flinty paths of duty. True,—

"The path of duty is the way to glory,"

but to win that glory we must

"On with toil of heart and knees and hands,"

over long leagues of dusty road that sorely test our staying power.

The period of middle life is a critical and often perilous time in Christian experience. It is on that hot, hard stretch of the road between the years of thirty-five and fifty that the reserve force of the spirit is most severely taxed. The way grows a little cooler, and, perhaps, more level after that; but on these miles the grade is heavy and the sun strikes hot. Here many a life deteriorates. Its ideals droop. Its enthusiasms wither. These are years of disillusionment. Mirages fade. Disguises are detected. The cosmetic cracks. Veneers peel off. The siren's song, that to the unsuspecting youth had sounded clear and true, now ends in hollow, mocking laughter. Over the disillusioned soul there spreads the pale cast of cynicism. The mood grows pessimistic. The cup of reverie has a bitter taste. Signs of exhaustion appear. There is a suggestion of autumn in the air. The song-birds seem to have departed. Interests that once excited us become suddenly puerile, frivolous and vain. We grow analytical and introspective,

and life loses the billowy rush of those tidal-waves of enthusiasm which once swept so invincibly through the soul. Where once there was an ardent flame of hope burning in the soul, there is nothing left but a poor smudge from a smoking wick.

Is there no preventive against all this? Is there no way to preserve the virility and spontaneity of the spirit through the trying years of middle life? Must we all come to their close with lowered ideals and burnt-out hearts? The psalm gives answer. And it is just the answer that we long to hear. It assures us that in the companionship of God there is a continuous renewal for us in the spirit of the mind. "He restoreth my soul." He carries on a process of recreation that defies the ravages of time. As the days go by new flowers spring up within the soul and new song-birds build their nests among its boughs. This note of renewal is one upon which the psalmist loves to dwell. He strikes it again and again. Of the man who lives in communion with God he

affirms that "his leaf shall not wither"; "he shall be full of sap and green;" his "youth is renewed like the eagle's"; he shall "go from strength to strength."

The same assurance is repeated in the New Testament, only in a higher, clearer, sweeter strain. Jesus said: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." The picture of an inextinguishable vitality reappears again with heightened color upon the glowing canvas of the Revelation. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof . . . was the tree of life." Mark those words, *in the midst of the street.* The thronged, trampled street! There, where the crowds jostle! There, where traffic goes! There, where the multitude passes on heedless, hurrying feet! It is the last place, one would think, where verdure could appear. But

even there "the tree of life is blooming." It is the final word of inspiration concerning the invincible virility of the God-nourished soul. In such a soul the verdure cannot be exterminated. It cannot be trampled out, whether by hoof, or heel, or wheel. It does seem to us sometimes, in the busy days of middle life, when we are thronged with multitudinous duties and cares and responsibilities, that our souls become like the open city streets. We seem to be without "shelter to grow strong, or leisure to grow wise." It looks to us, at these times, as though the bloom of life had gone forever. It is then we need the message which is spoken here. Fed from the fountain in the throne, through the conduit of faith, the tree of life springs up "in the midst of the street."

Furthermore, the teaching here sets forth a precious fact concerning God's *guidance* of us through these strenuous days of life. Sheep are proverbially witless creatures. They are almost utterly devoid of the sense of

direction, pathetically unable to choose their path, and hence extremely liable to lose their way if unattended by a guide.

And we all, like sheep, do go astray unless a divine pathfinder directs our steps. No more mischievous hallucination can beset a human soul than that of a fancied self-sufficiency for finding the true line of march. All the native energy of mind will be wasted, and all the acquired strength of youth be frittered away in a blind fumbling for the path, if there be not with us a guide who can overlook all the ways and see through all our days from the cradle to the grave.

But men will ask, Is not Conscience an infallible guide? Conscience, indeed, holds high office in the human soul, but conscience is not pathfinder for us. Conscience is the faculty of moral discrimination, not of moral discovery. Conscience approves or disapproves of paths which are pointed out to us, but conscience finds no path of itself. Conscience is the commanding officer abiding in the tent and de-

ciding upon the movements of the army according to reports which the scouts bring in. Or we may say, conscience is a judge adjudicating between acts, motives, tendencies, when these are submitted for trial before its court. But it can only handle the case in view of the evidence presented before it. If the evidence is false or defective, the verdict is correspondingly corrupted. Hence it has come to pass that many of the blackest crimes which have stained the annals of the world have been done in the name and under the approval of conscience. Conscience commands, but conscience cannot guide.

But may we not fall back upon Reason for our guide—reason, the scout of the soul, its ranger and outrider? Here truly we have a power of discovery, but of its sad incompetence to find the way of life and peace the history of mankind gives tragic and conclusive proof. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." No keener intellects ever

grappled with the problems of duty and of destiny than those whose names appear in the best literature of Rome. But the way of life they did not find. In "Athens, the eye of Greece," the light of reason shone with sparkling brilliancy. Yet Athens rotted to the bone. The vilest vices flourished in the very shadow of its altar "to an unknown God." And when has the world witnessed a wilder orgy of lust, a more unbridled carnival of crime, than in that devil's dance of Paris under the reign of "The Goddess of Reason"? Or look at things as they are in India to-day. There are no subtler minds thinking through human brains than you may meet among the educated Brahmins of Calcutta and Madras. Yet the soul of a decent man fairly swoons with disgust and horror when a missionary whispers into his ear the story of their lives.

But is there not in man, at least in some men, an Intuitional Faculty upon which they may depend for safe guidance in the ordering of life? It is confidently affirmed by modern repre-

sentatives of "the Greek spirit" that in these naive intuitions of the heart the true light of life is found. Live the life, they tell us, of an unfettered earth-child! Give free play to every impulse as it rises! Let your life respond to all the beauty and the music and the gladness of the world! Set yourself forth like an Æolian harp where all the inspirations of the lovely nature-world can touch you! So shall you live ideally. So shall you fulfil the purpose of your being and achieve your appointed destiny. An accepted apostle of this doctrine, now so much in vogue in art salons and circles of æsthetical clubdom, appeared some years ago in England. He—I shall not stain these pages with his name—claimed to be "a child of nature," "a son of song and sunshine." He would teach a dull and over-serious age the way to live. He would be the harbinger of a bright renaissance. With a graceful wave of his lavender gloved hand, he dismissed all the commonly accepted canons of conduct and relegated the

religious and ethical ideas of his time to limbo. Poor, filthy fool, it was not long before he trod a prison cell, clanking the felon's ball and chain. The light he followed was light from hell.

The guide we need is a guide from heaven. Jesus Christ is the guide we need. Above the intuitions, above the reason, above the conscience, yet correcting them and uniting them all in coalescent action, He stands and points our path.

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness."

The very God, yet a man and our Brother, stands in our midst and cries, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." He was the one man of all Time's millions who could wrap the drapery of this psalm about Him and say without the slightest hint of egotism, as He shook out all its shining folds—"I am the good shepherd." Men have declared that amid all the recorded words of Jesus we can find no claim of His to Deity. But what more definite claim could He

lay to Godhood than to lift from the jewel case of the Psalter this diadem of song, dedicated to Jehovah, and calmly place it upon his own brow? Unblushingly He appropriated to Himself this royal robe and crown. The centuries have looked and confessed that they are His own by every right. The royal apparel befits His regal form. Here is one who can guide. He knows his sheep. He knows the way. He sees through life and death. He sees through time and eternity. He sees through the heart of God.

The shepherd guides his flock by walking before them in the way. They follow him, keeping his moving form in view.

The secret of a right life for man is in looking to Jesus, and keeping Him in sight. He is not merely geographer for us, but guide; not merely chart-maker of the way, but escort in the way. "When he putteth forth his own he goeth before them." Christ is ever a shining presence on the paths of duty. Any gap in the line of duty left unilluminated would

be for Him the graveyard of His reputation. He must bring the flock through in safety—"for his name's sake." He always gives us light enough to walk by. In following Him the next step is always plain. If we "ask to see the distant scene," the request may be denied. If on the march we halt to theorize upon the mystery of His personality, His form may grow dim and indistinct. To the speculative reason Christ may become a spectral form, gliding ghostlike through the gloom. But to earnest-hearted seekers for guidance in the way of righteousness He presently appears in radiancy. Yes, there is always light enough to walk by. There always comes quick answer to our heart cry, "What would Jesus do?"

"Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

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"I do not ask, O Lord, that Thou shouldst shed
Full radiance here;
Give but a ray of peace, that I may tread
Without a fear."

—*A. A. Procter.*

CHAPTER VI

ADVENTURES IN THE SHADOWED GLEN

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

THE land of Judea is pierced in every direction by deep and narrow glens. In these the shadows gather early in the afternoon. No sooner does the sun begin its westering than the glens commence to fill with gloom.

To lead a flock through one of these sunless canyons is always an adventure attended by grave peril. The shepherd here must be alert, with every sense on guard.

Behold him now, as, gripping his stout staff, and with every nerve at tension, he warily enters the glen, the flock following hard at his heels! Cautiously he threads the gloom, interpreting with practised eye and ear each sight and sound and movement

in the enveloping shadows. With his rod he smites the ground before him and to right and left. There the soft earth yields. It is the quaking bog where a sheep may speedily be sucked to death in the black ooze. He signals the flock to halt, thrusting back the eager leaders with his body, or smartly striking a too pushful one with his staff. Nor does he put them forward again until he has found the safe detour.

Now an ugly rock obstructs the way. He must guide carefully here, else its sharp points may disembowel some hapless sheep crushed against it in the eager crowding of the flock.

He keeps a keen lookout for wild beasts, since in these shades a wolf may lurk, or a panther make its lair. Should he hear a growl, or find himself confronted by a pair of blazing eyes, his shrill whistle sounds instant alarm to stay the flock. Bravely then he springs to battle, and with resounding blows of his mighty staff drives the brute before him until it slinks away bleeding in pain or foaming with baffled rage.

Such are the adventures of the glen, and in these adventures the shepherd gives the crowning evidence of his skill and heroism.

No portion of the psalm comes closer home to personal experience than this which we have before us now. It is instinct with the romance of religion—a-thrill with the spirit of divine knight-errantry.

Shadows fall early into human life. While yet we are far from "sunset and evening star," our path dips down into the glen that is filled with gloom. "The shadow of death!" How many deaths there are other than our own, which fling their chilling shadows into our hearts! The death of your friend, your lover, your other-life; the death of your hope through the collapse of some cherished plan; the death of your personal ambitions amid "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"; the death of your good name under the assaults of slander—these are but a few of the experiences which may intercept the sunlight and fill your glen with gloom.

Commentators are fond of telling us that the "shadows cannot hurt." That is but a shallow optimism playing with a poor platitude. It contradicts the facts of experience. Ask that worse than widowed wife, sitting in the shadow of her husband's crime, what she knows about it! Ask the children walking in the shadow of their parents' shame! Ask the husband standing in the shadow cast by the death of her who was the centre of all his interests and the source of all his comfort! Ask the multitude of the incapacitated, broken ere their prime—students, singers, artists, preachers—ask them if the shadow hurts! Nay, we do not need to ask. The shadow does hurt. Sometimes it kills.

And then the horrible things which breed in the shadows and lurk and raven there! Out of the shadow of unhealth have we not seen the tiger creep in the form of a craving for nerve-stimulation? It seemed a docile creature as it followed at the elbow of the jaded man of business, or purred

at the feet of an exhausted mother, or awaited the brain-fagged professional man at his office door. Fawning and friendly it appeared, as it softly knelt beside the couch of the tired toiler and licked the hands which hung down relaxed and listless. But once it got the taste of blood it crouched for the fatal spring.

In the shadow of their disappointment or bereavement, how many lose their way, plunging into recklessness, to be presently bogged in a hell-hole of uncleanness. "Deceived—abandoned!" These two words tell the story of countless castaways. We know, nay, we do not know, how many thousands of women go reeling to destruction down the dim aisles of the years made dark and hopeless for them by the men who owed them reverence and love. We remember, too, another multitude of unfortunates who in the shadow of financial ruin grind their very souls out against the jutting crags of poverty which now obstruct their path! Few, indeed, there are who emerge from the glen

with untorn garments and shining face.

Far different is it with the souls which keep close to Christ. In the valley, dark with the piled-up blackness of all the shadows, they "fear no evil." He who, with the pangs of the cross upon Him, refused the drugged wine, drives before them the wild beasts of abnormal appetite. He who, though abandoned and betrayed, kept to love and faith and service along the pain-path, leads them away from the slough into which they would otherwise stumble with careless feet. He who maintained that brave, sweet dignity and patience through the years when He had not where to lay his head, cushions for them the piercing points of poverty. This is the testimony of all who have followed Him "amid the encircling gloom."

"Thou art with me." These four little monosyllables make a magic charm to ward off fear of evil. They are like a wall of steel around the soul. This is the first time that the second personal pronoun occurs in the psalm. Up to this point the references to

Jehovah have all been in the third person. "He" does all. "He" feeds, refreshes, restores, and guides. But now there is a change. "Thou" art with me. The new form of address indicates a relation of increasing intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep. It marks an advance from the mood of reflection to that of communion. The change of mood corresponds to changed conditions. It is a significant fact that it is in the glen the first "Thou" rings out. The sheep crowd closest to their shepherd in the darkness. He becomes eyes for them. "He knoweth what is in the darkness;" the darkness behind them, the darkness around them, the darkness before them. "The darkness and the light are both alike" to Him. His presence is their safety.

Not only is there safety in the glen, but comfort also, for those who abide by the shepherd. Manifold are the comfortings of the shepherd's rod. It comforts me when it tests the road before me. It comforts me when it fences me off from danger, though

then it may seem like an iron wall across my path. It comforts me when it lifts me from my fall. It comforts me in beating back the foe. It comforts me even when it smites me. Have you never thought that it is the sheep nearest the shepherd which receives the warning blow when sudden danger threatens? Think it not strange if it falls on thee when thou art following close! Thou art in the very place to receive the stroke. Canst thou not endure, yea, even welcome it, for thy safety and the safety of those who may be following thee? It is His recognition of thy nearness to Him and of thy leadership among His people. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

Sometimes the stroke is for corrective ends. I once heard of a Scottish shepherd who was sorely tried by the frequent misadventures of one wild lamb. It gave more trouble than all the flock. It seemed incorrigible. One day the shepherd took that lamb and deliberately broke its leg. Cruel shepherd? Nay. Having broken the

leg, he carefully set it again, tenderly bound it up, and then lovingly carried the helpless creature in a sling about his shoulders. Day after day, while the healing was in process, the shephere bore the lamb, giving it food and drink from his own hand. He nursed it with a mother's tenderness. When the healing was complete and the lamb was placed upon its feet again, it was seen to be the closest follower in the flock. It never left the shepherd's side again.

It was even thus that the Shepherd, whom he now praises, treated David in the days of his wild heart-wanderings. God broke that wanderer's leg that He might carry him in His arms for a season, until he should learn the depths of grief and love divine. We have the story of that experience in the thirty-second psalm. He speaks of the time when God's hand was heavy upon him; when his bones waxed old through his roaring all day long; when his moisture was turned into the drought of summer. And then God took that fevered, sick, com-

plaining soul and shed upon it a great and healing grace. In boundless mercy He forgave the iniquity of his sin. In the warm, close clasp of pardoning love the Shepherd whispered to His stricken one the inner meaning of the stroke. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." David needed no bit or bridle after that to keep him near. Thereafter, God could lead him by a look.

"Come and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn and he will heal us; he hath smitten and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him. And let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord."

"Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging
round?
On Jesus' bosom nought but calm is found.

"Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us
and ours?
Jesus hath vanquished death and all its
powers."

—*E. H. Bickersteth.*

CHAPTER VII

SUPPER ON THE DARKENING WOLD

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

Now the flock emerges from the glen. The sun is sinking toward the west, and soon the darkness will come drifting down. There is only time for the evening meal before the flock is folded for the night.

Several facts concerning this evening meal are specially worthy of consideration.

A good shepherd seeks to make the supper for his flock the sweetest meal of the day. If there is one bit of pasture greener and richer than the rest, he reserves that for the day's end. I have seen a shepherd in the sunset hour call his sheep from the commons and turn them into the fenced field of clover that they might go full-fed to their rest. Herdmen do the same for their cattle.

What a picture of peace it makes—this supper on the darkening wold—when the sheep feed richly on the guarded green! For now the dew is again upon the earth. The grass is moist. The air is incense-laden from the flowers which all day long have been breathing forth their fragrance. And the fold is near.

The analogy holds true in the experience of Christ's followers. The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls reserves His choicest swards for the delectation of our later days. Beulah Land lies near the bounds of life. It comes after the long march on the roads and the adventures in the glen. Let those who face the "sunset of life" lay this comfort on their hearts! The gospel is "a great supper," as well as a satisfying breakfast, for the soul. It opens into the richest enclosures toward the day's end. Our Shepherd surpasses Himself in the banquet which He spreads for His followers on the evening tablelands of life.

"In the presence of mine enemies." The day's dangers are not ended with

the finding of the evening feeding-ground. This period of the day has its own peculiar perils. This is the hour when the wolf is emboldened in its approach. It is the time when the robber creeps near to mark his prey. Now, too, the vulture eyes the scene. They, as well as the sheep, are looking for an evening meal.

A good shepherd will carefully inspect the evening pasture-ground before he calls his sheep to feed. He scans the hillsides for any suspicious movements that may betoken an enemy's approach. With long knife drawn and ready for use, should sudden need of it arise, he makes a careful circuit of the feeding-ground, thus by his precautionary movements describing a circle of safety within the rim of danger.

The picture here is one of extraordinary power. What an heroic figure the shepherd makes as he thus stands forth before the flock, and before their enemies and his. He but needs to show himself and enemies are cowed. The lightnings of his eyes strike terror

to their hearts. At the menace of his look they slink away. He who is all gentleness towards the flock is an overwhelming terror towards the foes which threaten them. They do not dare dispute the sward with him. They have no courage to come to combat here. They might risk an encounter in the shadowed glen, but not here, where they can take the measure of his form. It was conquest for the shepherd there; it is a bloodless triumph for him here. He stands the undisputed master of the field. The enemies may look upon it; they dare not leap upon it. Thus the shepherd makes a show of them openly by calling the sheep to come and feast in their very presence.

The scene at this point suggests another impressive feature of Christ's shepherding of men. There comes a time in the experience of those who closely follow Him when the very majesty of His manifested presence quells all foes and makes a place of quiet feasting for the soul. There comes a time when even Satan knows

that the soul has passed beyond his power and he calls off his dogs of war.

Have you noticed the progress towards this condition of unchallenged security in the experience of St. Paul? Compare again the seventh and eighth chapters of his epistle to the Romans! The seventh chapter is the shadowed glen. It is thick with gloom. It resounds with the din of warfare. The panthers of evil passion snap and snarl. Yet Christ is there, with rod and staff, and so His follower goes forward, though with stress and strain. But in the eighth chapter the apostle is with his Lord on higher ground. He breathes another air, the air of the wold. All now is quietness and confidence and sense of restfulness. Not that all enemies are slain, but all are quelled before the presence of the sovereign Christ. The heroic face of the Son of God has been turned full on the field and before the majesty of that face all enemies retire awe-stricken and undone. "We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." "Yet we are more than conquerors through him

that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The consciousness of a table prepared in the presence of his enemies finds expression again in the closing words of his epistle to the Galatians. "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus." That he was a Christ's man, henceforth and forever, was past all peradventure. He serves notice to that effect upon all and sundry who might think it worth their while to attempt a disturbance of his relation to Christ, or to dispute his privileges in grace. The attempt would be absurd. He has gone too far with Christ, grown too intimate with Him, been too completely charactered by Him, for any separation now. Let them face that fact. Here is a man tattooed with Jesus. He is

Christ's slave. Let the world deal with his Master who put the marks upon him. For himself, he will walk in peace by his Master's side.

What a glowing prospect this view unfolds before the Christian as he approaches the maturity of his experience in the evening-time of life! It may be for him not only the time of richest feasting, but also of sweetest serenity. The day comes to faithful followers of the Lord when even the enemy cannot look upon them and not behold the Christ.

Yet one cannot but think with sorrow of another condition suggested by this picture; the condition of those who are moving towards the evening shadows without a sense of the Good Shepherd's care. For such the late afternoon of life is a cheerless time. For them there is no supper on the darkening wold. The evening hills are bare. They feed on ashes. They themselves become food for vultures. For there are certain forms of evil which, like coward beasts of prey, hide from the tell-tale blaze of day

and only creep out in the evening shadows for their drink of blood. While fleshly passions burn themselves out in the course of years, the spiritual passions flare up into hotter flame. Avarice is one of these. It bites deeper and deeper into the soul as the years go by. Envy is another foe that leaps upon the field where no shepherd guards. Malice and wrath and railing are there to rend the soul. But why elaborate the picture? A life unshepherded at evening-time is a tragedy too dark for words.

"Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea,
And laden souls, by thousands meekly stealing,
Kind shepherd, turn their weary steps to Thee."

—*F. W. Faber*

CHAPTER VIII

TWILIGHT AT THE SHEEPFOLD DOOR

"Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

THE picture here is rich in oriental coloring. It is twilight now, and the "evening bell" is tinkling within the fold, calling the weary flock to rest. At the sheepfold door the shepherd stands in the fading light to inspect the sheep as they pass in single file to find their places for the night.

The affectionate solicitude of the shepherd now finds expression in a singularly beautiful and beneficent ministry. He remembers how long the day has been; how hot and dusty the roads; how exhausting to the sheep the excitements and struggles of the way. Hence he prepares a special benediction to be bestowed at the moment of their retirement to the fold.

Yonder comes a sheep whose head

is drooping low. Its slow, uncertain movements speak of utter weariness. Its strength is almost spent. With languid wistfulness the sheep lifts up its tired, dust-stained face in answer to the shepherd's call, and lo! it receives an anointing, fragrant and refreshing. For the shepherd, quick to note the signs of exhaustion, fills the hollow of his hand with olive oil from the horn at his side, and gently bathes the face now gratefully uplifted to him. And when this is done, he extends the cup filled from the well by the fold, that the thirsty one may drink.

It is an exquisite picture of Christ's tender grace as He stands to anoint and refresh the souls of believers when, weary and worn, they look up to Him in the gloaming of life's little day. No office which our Saviour performs is more precious and beautiful than this in which He touches His weary ones with balm, that they may retire with cool, clean souls to rest.

There is a pensiveness about the twilight hour which every sensitive

soul must keenly feel. It is an hour for retrospection and reflection. The labor of the day is ended, and the time for judgment upon its quality has come. Has life been worth the living? Is there any profit from its toil? Have we gathered diamonds or dust? Happy is he who can see a straight string of purpose running through the years, binding them all together like a rope of pearls. Too often the years God gives us are allowed to pass unstrung, slipping through our fingers like loose beads.

But even those who live the noblest must suffer the distinctive pain of the twilight. It is no light matter for one who has loved his work to lay it down or relinquish it to other hands. If a man puts conscience and imagination and sympathy into his work there must come a sharp pang to his heart in the hour when he definitely retires from it. Do you wonder that a look of suffering comes into the dim eyes of him who has cleared the land and drained the fields and planted the orchard and sunk the well and built

the house, when the day comes for him to give the deed of it all into younger and stronger hands? Do you wonder that the heart of the prima-donna bleeds when she faces her last audience to sing her swan-song? Do you wonder that the Christian pastor who has loved the souls of men, and found it ecstasy to preach the Gospel, deems the day of his superannuation the saddest day of all his life? If the thought of rest is sweet, 'tis bitter-sweet when we realize that the outgoings of life are ended. When the door shuts that cuts us off from our loved toil, it shuts upon the heart and cuts it to the quick. In that hour there is but one who can give the "oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"—the Shepherd who stands at the twilight door, hands dipped in balm, to bestow His evening benediction. He, with His hand upon our hearts, is the "Pilot of the purple twilight," guiding, and soothing as He guides, to rest.

One cannot but think of brilliant

lives that tragically missed the evening blessing. In the great French drama the aged cardinal is asked, "Art thou Richelieu?" And he replies, "Yesterday I was Richelieu, to-day I am a poor, old man; to-morrow I know not what." And there was Cardinal Wolsey, staggering in disgrace and disease to the Abbey of Leicester, and moaning on his deathbed, "Had I but served God as diligently as I have served the King, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs." What a contrast between the twilight of their day and that of Shaftesbury or Gladstone! The former passed from picturesque and impressive manhood into wretchedness and feebleness and gloom. The latter passed, through faith and righteousness and unselfish service, into the dignities and compensating comforts of "a good old age."

There come to mind two men of my acquaintance, men who honored me with their friendship, who were notable exhibitors of the reviving influences of a twilight anointing. One

was an educationist. In the realms both of secondary and of higher education, he was a master. He wrought out for and established in two Canadian provinces their splendid system of free schools. In a third province he gave great impetus to the thought that resulted in the creation of a vigorous Christian university. For a brief period he stood at its head. Then, realizing that his strength was broken, he suddenly stepped aside. With a single step he passed from noon to twilight. Those of us who knew him intimately knew that the pain of the twilight was acute in his heart. But the compensations were sweet and satisfying. The Master held out to him the brimming cup of joy.

"Then purged with euphrasy and rue
The visual nerve, for he had much to see."

And he told us what he saw in kindling speech. The fountain of song was unsealed within his heart. For the few years that were left to him he moved among us like a winged

spirit. He was our nightingale singing in the twilight. He was our inspirationist, our prophet, our guide, philosopher and friend. The beauty, the richness, the literary fruitfulness of those years were the marvel and delight of all who saw. In the twilight of his day God crowned him with loving-kindness and tender mercies; he satisfied his mouth with good things, so that his youth was renewed like the eagle's.

The other man was a merchant. Remembering his great humility I must not write his name. He was a kingly man. And he was intensely in love with life. He had great capacity for business, which he pushed with enthusiastic but aseptically clean hands. He revelled in benevolences. He was fond of social life. He loved good books. He was enamored of the beauties and sublimities of the nature-world around him. On every side of him he was tinglingly alive. But for him the twilight came, as it seemed to us, all too soon. For several years before his death he was an

invalid. All the interests that had been so dear to him, except such benevolences as he could direct from his bedside, were shut out from his life. Yet he never lived so deeply, so joyously, so triumphantly as in those years. His spirit was charged with a divine power that thrilled you the moment you came into his room. He seemed more than human in the glowing beauty and entrancing sweetness of his character. I have waited at his bedside to see him wake from sleep, and it seemed like the waking of an angel. Some who will read this book will know that there is no extravagance of statement here. That name is cherished in many hearts to-day as their sweetest memory. I shall never cease to thank God that I was permitted to be near and witness the anointing of that life in the twilight hour.

The oil and the cup! It seems to me that at this point the psalm reaches a climax in the celebration of the intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep. For now the Shepherd's hand

rests caressingly upon His follower's head and they come face to face in a fellowship which kindles joy unspeakable and full of glory. Indeed, it seems almost too sacred a thing to speak about. We can scarcely handle it at all with our clumsy words and not bruise its exquisite bloom. Only let us pray that "Love Divine" may keep tryst with us in the twilight hour when we stagger in wounds and weariness to life's evening couch!

"Twilight and evening bell
And after that the dark."

—*Tennyson.*

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT WITHIN THE GATES

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

HITHERTO the song has been all of love's leadings. The shepherd has gone before the sheep, feeding, leading, clearing the way. Now there is a change of view and he is seen, in the guise of "goodness and mercy," following after the flock and performing the office of impregnable rear-guard.

The series of pictures would not be artistically complete, nor adequate to practical life-needs, without this added scene. For not always can the perils of our lives be fronted. Frequently they camp upon our rear. They rise up out of the past and persistently dog our steps. Apart from a shepherding that renders the soul inviolable from the rear, we should speedily be hunted down to death.

There are the bloodhounds of he-

reditary taint and constitutional defect and transmitted tendency. They are a hungry and vicious pack. And they follow us "all the days" of our lives. We can never shake them off. Travel as fast and as far as we may, we cannot outfoot them. Even while we congratulate ourselves that we have distanced them, and that they have lost the scent, we hear them growling at our heels. So powerful and persistent is the force of inherited tendency that many observant students of life have declared it to be the determining factor in human destiny. We are familiar with the testimony of criminal statistics upon this point. Criminal instincts run in the blood from generation to generation. There are multitudes of human wrecks grinding upon the rocks to-day because the rudder of their will was set and lashed to leeward by a foolish or vicious ancestry, and the offspring lack the moral force to cut the cords and release the wheel. We know, too, how many sensualists excuse themselves and cast the blame

of their unclean lives upon the forces of heredity that pushed them into the ditch. Unquestionably, it is a dark fact that the evil which men do lives after them in the form of a relentlessly pursuing force upon the path of their descendants.

We are followed, too, "all the days" of our life by the sins of our youth. We remember them and they are remembered by others. Long after we have set our faces toward the better life, and after we have walked the clean, straight paths of righteousness, these old sins lift up their voice and warn us that they are following still. The hostile shapes they take are legion. Gaunt, gray wolves they are, pressing on and ever on.

We are pursued also by the accumulating sorrows of the years. There are some lives which seem to be specially marked for misfortune. They are hounded through their days by "black disaster, following fast and following faster." Bereavement bites early into their hearts, and as

their way advances "sorrows still increase." On the later stages of the journey accumulated sorrows sometimes sweep down upon the soul like an avalanche.

But over against these dark facts the bright fact rises, that between our souls and these hard-following foes Christ stands, our constant and competent Rear-guard. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" of faith's pilgrim journey. He comes between us and the foe, whether the foe be at the front or rear.

He comes between us and the destructive power of a bad heredity. By His enabling grace He "breaks our birth's invidious bar," and gives us strength to "grapple with our evil star, to grasp the skirts of happy chance, and breast the waves of circumstance." In His "goodness and mercy" He secures for each human soul that looks to him the way of return to holiness and God. The knowledge of a man's ancestry is not sufficient data upon which to base a proph-

ecy concerning his career. Heredity is not the only fact to be considered. It does not hold the rear-ground of life exclusively. There is the fact of a divine intervention. God steps in there to file His claim upon the soul. He fathers it in grace; not, indeed, to the annihilation of inherited tendency, but to the deliverance of the soul from its enslaving power.

This was the distinctive message of the prophet Ezekiel*:

"What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Thus goodness and mercy draw the teeth of this grim law of heredity, and make it an incentive toward righteousness. God takes the

*Ezek. 18: 2–4.

rudder in His own hand and steers each soul that yields to Him.

He comes between us and the sins of our youth. In my experience as a pastor I have found many men and women who were held back from an open avowal of the Christian life by memories of their past transgressions. It was the thing that had been done they feared, not what they might do in the future. It was the wolf behind, not the lion before, that held the terror over them. It is easier for some people to believe in the conquering power of "the cross of Jesus going on before" than in a goodness and mercy that can defend them from a pursuing past. But the scepticism is unwarranted by experience. Old sins do follow, but He follows closer. They may chase us, but they cannot capture us while He stands between. The foam of their rage falls harmlessly at His feet. He will not give us "as a prey to their teeth." With Him as rearward, "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we are escaped."

The facts of David's own life give a special piquancy to the teaching here. There was a dark time in his life when the wolves of evil passion tore him. But the Good Shepherd plucked him from the pack, and set him on a clean straight path. Did the royal penitent sometimes hear the baying of the pack upon his rear? Undoubtedly he did. But when he turned and looked in terror, lo! between him and their gleaming fangs the Shepherd stood. To see Him there restored the rhythm to his heart.

There is no more painful experience in life than to be torn and stung by excoriating recollections of old sins. To open the book of memory and scan the black pages, to have the old scars wake and burn again, is a torture. Many of the noblest spirits have felt it: David and Paul, and Peter and Augustine. The moan of that anguish resounds throughout our greatest literature. Listen to the plaint of Lancelot:

"For what am I? what profits me my name

Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it;
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart."

Hear, also, the despairing cry of Guinevere, his partner in guilt:

"Shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine shall ever be a name of scorn."

It is all heart-breaking in its hopeless sadness. But the sequel showed that both for Lancelot and Guinevere there was glorious deliverance. "So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful

pain, *not knowing he should die a holy man.*" As for Guinevere, to her came Arthur in forgiving grace and assurance of undying love. Between her and the shameful past he planted as rear-guard his own pure love and quenchless faith. Thus he beat back from her soul the torments of despair and won her to a holy life.

The Good Shepherd comes between us and the sorrows of the past. Christ's treatment of sorrows is unique and wonderful. He takes them into His own hands and their power for injury is never the same again. He wipes the poison from every blade. Sorrow, after Christ has touched it, becomes a minister of good. It is transmuted from bane to blessing. He makes it possible for us to rejoice not only in spite of tribulations, but even because of them; as he sang to us, whose voice but yesterday was stilled*:

"O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,

* Dr. George Matheson.

And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be."

And amid all the pain Christ gives us the comfort of His exquisite sympathy. We can never forget that "Jesus wept."

"To forge a sun, to rivet myriad stars,
Through serried veins to pour earth's flashing rills,
To kennel hungry seas in granite bars,
To whet the lightnings on the rock-brow'd hills,
Majestic wonders! But sweet to be kept,
And crowning wonder of them all—God wept!

"Lo! Our humanity has touched God's crown,
As some frail leaf might touch the bending spheres;
And from the heights of Godship He stooped down
To bathe His forehead in a brine of tears.
He lived and talked with men, He toiled and slept,
But struck our human key-note when—He wept.

"Weep, burdened soul, let fall thy tears like rain!
God counts the drops in which thy slow years steep,

He gathers them like mountain dew again,
Transformed to pearls which seraphim shall keep
For thy soul's crowning when, by cares unswept,
It leans upon the breast of Him who wept."

But all this gospel of the rear-guard has special signification for old age. The scene which the psalm presents at this point is the closing scene of the day. The journeyings of the flock are ended. The door of the fold is shut. It is night and the time of stars. The sheep lie down in their quiet resting-places. The chief need now is for a night patrol to sentinel the flock and protect their rest. In the thought of the psalmist the sentinel is placed. The guard is at the door. The shepherd himself is there. The flock may rest in peace.

It will help us to a better appreciation of this strain of the song if we call to mind the characteristic Jewish feeling for old age. Not only had the pious Jew a tender reverence for the aged, but he hoped for himself that he

might live to be old. He had an ambition to see his seed unto the third and fourth generation. A great age was an occasion of pride to him. The feeling was inextricably interwoven with his religion. A long life, with a quiet resting time at its close, when he might be surrounded by a circle of devoted descendants, was to him an unmistakable mark of divine favor. It was one of the covenant blessings. Then, too, we must remember that the Jew of David's time had no clear outlook into the future beyond the grave. For him death meant an interruption, even an interception of relations with Jehovah. Whatever God would do for him so he believed, must be done in this life. It was natural, therefore, that he should fervently desire length of days on earth.

All this, of course, is vastly different from the prevailing modern mood. We speak now as though it were a misfortune to live to a great age. We hope to die in the harness. We would "cease at once to labor and to live." We dread to "lag superfluous" on the

stage. To outlive activity seems a curse.

The change in view is partly due, no doubt, to our brighter thought of what awaits us beyond the Great Divide. "Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." To the Christian "the best is yet to be" in the land beyond the flood. That is the Eldorado of his hopes. He knows that "to die is gain."

Yet the modern recoil from the idea of old age is not wholly due to this brighter thought of the hereafter. It is characteristic even of those whose hopes do not turn to heaven. It is partly to be accounted for by a diminished sense of the beauty of old age and partly by a slackening of the family bond.

This is the day of the young man. He must make his fortune by the time he is forty, and be ready for the chloroform at sixty! The popular ideal of life to-day is to rush early into your chosen career, climb swiftly to success, wave your flag for a brief moment on

the summit of the hill, and then make way for the generation pushing up breathlessly behind.

It is all a sad mistake. We are missing the best this life can give in thus galloping pell-mell through our years and dropping in sudden exhaustion in the early evening-time of life. For,

"Age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, tho' in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars invisible by day."

It is out of a typical Jewish reverence for the dignities and amenities of old age that Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra sings:

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be.
The last of life for which the first was made;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, a whole I planned!
Youth shows but half; trust God! see all
nor be afraid."

And it was out of such a fine and tender feeling for old age that David uttered these glowing words of thank-

ful trust. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." He hoped his days might be many; he knew they would all be good if God was in them.

Observe how the close of the psalm bends back and touches its beginning! Leadings and followings, these form the perfect circle of God's Shepherdhood. Within that circle the believer may safely abide till travelling days, yes, and till resting days are done.

"And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;
For tho' from out our bourne of Time and
Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

—*Tennyson.*

CHAPTER X

FOREGLEAMS OF THE HEAVENLY DAWN

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

In this assurance the faith of David vaults clear above the common conception of his time regarding the life beyond.

Though the Jew of that time believed in an existence of the soul after death, he cherished no clear hope of blessedness beyond the grave.

His soul, so he believed, would pass into Sheol, the general receptacle of human spirits. Sheol, to him, was a dim, vague, unorganized realm. It was a land of darkness. There the soul retained but a flickering outline of its former personality. Existence there was regarded as a nerveless, feeble reflection of life on earth, a state of silence and forgetfulness. In Sheol the relation between the dead person and God was supposed to be cut off.

Fellowship with God came to an end. "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who shall give thee thanks? For Sheol cannot praise thee, and they that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth." Thus the forward-looking Jew "dreed his weird" concerning the hereafter.

But mark how David's faith by the vitality and vigor of its content rises above all this! The ultimate disclosure to his heart of the innermost meaning of Jehovah's Shepherdhood reveals a relation so intimate, so personal, so spiritual, that—he is persuaded—not even death itself can break it. He is "bound in the bundle of life" with God; it is unthinkable to him that the bundle can ever be untied. God cannot be in heaven and leave him behind. Where the shepherd is the sheep must surely be. No member of Jehovah's flock can ever be banished to dim Sheol. That dark doom is reserved for the ungodly. "*They* are appointed as a flock for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd . . . and their beauty shall be for

Sheol to consume. But God will redeem *my* soul from the power of Sheol; for he shall receive me."* Thus he presently unfolds the faith which his experience of God's shepherdhood has nourished in his heart. In his firm conviction concerning the vital, spiritual union which now exists between his life and God, he finds assurance of uninterrupted and everlasting blessedness.

This, surely, is a notable achievement of faith. Achievement, do I say? Yes, for a confident and satisfying hope of blessedness beyond this life must always be achieved. No external word of revelation, however authoritative it may be, can fling it ready-made upon the soul. It must be wrought within, through conscious fellowship with God. As one has said, "We must get over upon the divine side of life before we can be assured of eternal life." That is to say, we must feel about our spirits the enfoldment of the infinite and eternal personality before we can be certain

*Psalm 49: 14–15.

that death shall not bring us harm. It was thus that the apostles came to be inheritors of "the blessed hope." For while they had certain knowledge of Christ's resurrection from the grave and ascension to the Father and session in glory, it was not these facts alone which gave them confidence concerning their own destiny, but the fact of their personal fellowship with Him in His shepherding of their souls. Their hope for the future, like that of David, rose winged and radiant from the ground of their personal relations to Him who was "alive forevermore."

This truth has a serious implication for all questers after light upon the hereafter. The plain fact is, that no clear light concerning what awaits us in the great beyond can be carried from the intellect to the heart. The light expires in the passage. The movement must be in the opposite direction; from the heart to the intellect. Reason is a great light-carrier, but its hand trembles here and its candle is blown out on the way. It arrives with but a smoking wick.

I know there are many indications of the soul's uninterrupted progress through the eternal years. I know there are strong presumptions and arguments in favor of that belief; but the heart wants certainty. And the only certainty comes through the consciousness of personal union with the Redeemer. We cannot be argued into this hope; but we may be "begotten unto" it by the regenerating grace of Christ. When Christ comes into our hearts through faith, then to those who sat in the darkness a light springs up, a light that cannot be blown out. Even on the brink of the grave, where the winds "from unsunned spaces" of eternity blow over it, that hope burns clear and steady. It is worth repeating, that out of his intimate, personal relations with the Shepherd David drew the boldness to affirm, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The song ends upon this grand finale. And the end crowns all. Like a diamond smitten by a shaft of sunlight, the whole psalm leaps into

sparkling splendor in the glory of its last triumphant words. Strike out these words and the diamond immediately deteriorates into common carbon, dull and opaque. It is this grand "forever" of the sweet relationship between God and the soul that sets each line and word of the psalm to music. It is this grand "forever" that gives meaning and magnitude to human life. It is this grand "forever" that makes it worth while to live and love and labor. Blot out this last effulgent word and you tear the sun and moon from the firmament of the soul. If there is nothing for us beyond the little fragment of years spent here in this time-life, does it matter so very much how we live? Shall man, who stands at nature's apex, find himself at last her prey? Shall

"Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

"Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,

Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

"No more? A monster, then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tear each other in their slime,
Were mellow music match'd with him."

Why should we love, if all we love and love itself must perish? Why should we labor, if all the fruit of labor must end in dust and ashes? Shall we write Iliads on rose leaves, paint Sistine Madonnas on tissue paper, or carve Apollo Belvideres in wax? It scarcely would be worth while. But to live and love and serve and suffer and achieve in view of that "forever" makes it a glorious thing to have been born a human soul.

Yes, it was a notable achievement of David's faith when he uttered these last triumphant words. The utterance not only crowns the psalm with splendor, but constitutes the richest fruitage from David's religious experience, and his chiefest contribution to the religious thinking of mankind.

So the psalm closes with the singer's

face shining in the Foregleams of the Heavenly Dawn. When next the fold-door opens he will be in God's house, there to dwell forever.

"For ever with the Lord!
Amen, so let it be;
Life from the dead is in that word,
'Tis immortality.
Here in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home.

"My Father's house on high,
Home of my soul, how near
At times to faith's foreseeing eye
Thy golden gates appear!
Ah! then my spirit faints
To reach the land I love,
The bright inheritance of saints,
Jerusalem above.

"For ever with the Lord!
Father, if 'tis Thy will,
The promise of that faithful word
E'en here to me fulfil.
Be Thou at my right hand,
Then can I never fail;
Uphold Thou me, and I shall stand;
Fight, and I must prevail.

"So when my latest breath
Shall rend the veil in twain,

By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the throne,
For ever with the Lord."

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